

State Representative **John Frenz**

Helping Hoosier Families

113th Indiana General Assembly, Spring 2004

Session Report



**Property
Tax Relief**



**Protecting
Children**



**Fighting
Abuses**





113th General Assembly Ends

Dear Friends,

The 2004 short session of the Indiana General Assembly has ended. I have detailed several important pieces of legislation in this newsletter, including property tax relief, children's safety issues and increased access to affordable prescription drugs.

I hope you find this information useful. Feel free to contact me if there are any of these issues you wish to discuss. Also, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about state government.

Sincerely,

John Franz



Property Tax Relief

When the Indiana General Assembly restructured our state's tax code in 2002, one goal from that effort was to give homeowners relief from the court-ordered reassessment. As the first series of assessments were completed, it became apparent that homeowners were facing an increasingly larger share of the burden passed to them by Indiana's courts.

Because of their concerns, House members led an effort to begin the 2004 session ahead of time. Starting in November, legislators began discussions on additional reforms that resulted in passage of Senate Enrolled Act 1, which contains nearly **\$500 million in protection for homeowners, businesses and farms from property tax increases**. It provides additional protections from both the court-ordered reassessment and unchecked local property tax increases.

When lawmakers returned in



January, our efforts resumed to give tax relief to the people who needed it the most. We were able to pass another measure (Senate Enrolled Act 296) that increases **property tax deductions for seniors on lower incomes, veterans, the blind and disabled**, as well as those who are rehabilitating homes.

House Enrolled Act 1005 takes additional steps to find other means of financing government services. One study committee will explore alternatives to the property tax, while another will examine the efficiency of local government operations.

This measure also sets up the groundwork for keeping property taxpayers better informed. A pilot program getting under way in 2005 will provide taxpayers in certain counties with detailed breakdowns on their **tax statements that will show where their tax dollars are being used**. Additionally, people who are financing or refinancing a home will be given information on the types of tax deductions available.

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Additional Bills Passed

There were several other significant pieces of legislation passed by the General Assembly. House Bill 1229, called The Indiana Homeowner Protection Act, places **tougher restrictions on the practice called predatory lending**. Homeowners will be protected from overpriced loans with unreasonable terms that often are impossible to pay back, placing people at risk of losing their homes through foreclosure.

House Bill 1449 will help **restore the constitutionality of Indiana's curfew law** by including provisions that protect minors who are exercising First Amendment rights.

House Bill 1178 will allow courts to create a program **permitting volunteers to become advocates for seniors**. Probate courts will be allowed to appoint trained and supervised volunteers to serve as guardians for a limited time to incapacitated or protected elderly who are at-risk inpatients in health care facilities in Indiana.

House Bill 1306 will allow members, survivors and beneficiaries of the **Public Employees' Retirement Fund (PERF)** and Teacher's Retirement Fund (TRF) to receive a **cost-of-living adjustment** beginning in 2005.

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Protecting Children

Legislators Address Safety Issues

During the 2004 session, several protection bills were passed guarding children. Legislators passed bills to protect children from abuse and neglect, and keep them safe in automobiles.

•**House Bill 1194** will provide tools to protect children from abuse or neglect. Criminal history checks will be required for each person who resides in a home in which a child is to be placed before the child is placed there. Child Protective Services (CPS) reports may now conclude if abuse or neglect is "indicated," as well as "substantiated" or "unsubstantiated." There will be an additional public disclosure in cases where a child dies as a result of abuse or neglect. A statewide group will be created under the bill to investigate the sudden and/or unexpected deaths of children.

•**House Bill 1245** will levy tougher penalties against people who neglect a child who ends up dying as a result of the crime. The bill will increase the penalty for neglect of a dependent to a

Class A Felony if the neglect results in the death of a child. Penalties will be increased for contributing to the delinquency of a minor if a person 21 years or older provides alcohol or a controlled substance to a minor, and the consumption of that alcohol or drug is determined to cause a death of any person.

•**Senate Bill 194** will provide added protections for all children in a home where abuses have taken place.

•**House Bill 1098** will require anyone who operates a motor vehicle with a passenger who is less than 8 years of age to place the child in a restraint system. Passengers between 8 and 16 years old will be required to wear a seat belt. Studies have indicated that child restraint systems can help prevent injuries caused when children do not properly fit in a safety belt.

In addition, the bill will create a Child Restraints System Account that will make grants to private and public organizations to purchase and distribute child restraint systems such as booster seats at minimal or no charge.



Medication Savings

Hoosiers Gain Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs

Legislators also worked hard to protect Hoosiers from the rising costs of prescription drugs. Under a plan approved this session, more than **400,000 Hoosiers would gain access to affordable prescription drugs**, with many more qualifying in years to come.

House Bill 1265 enables the state to set up an aggregate prescription drug purchasing program to negotiate the prices of prescription drugs from phar-

maceutical companies. **Indiana will also be able to enter into joint purchasing agreements with other states, gaining added bargaining power.**

People who sign up for the program will get a prescription drug card to receive the savings when they fill their prescriptions at their local drugstores. This program will simplify the lives of many and improve the conditions for people on fixed and limited incomes.

Helping Hoosier Families



Representative John Frenz (right) discusses legislation with Representative Dennie Oxley in the House chamber.

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Fighting Drugs, Alcohol

Lawmakers spent a lot of time this session trying to come up with real solutions to the problems brought on by the abuse of drugs and alcohol throughout Indiana. Among the most prominent concerns was the new wave of production and use of methamphetamine sweeping through the state. Criminals favor this drug because of its low cost, simple manufacture and easy accessibility. Another major problem the legislators resolved to face was the occurrence of drunk driving on Hoosier roadways.

House Bill 1136 creates a task force to combat the production, distribution and use of methamphetamine in Indiana. The task force will suggest specific actions to lessen the demand and decrease the supply of meth, improve the enforcement of meth laws, and evaluate the success of programs in other states to make recommendations for improving local, state and federal laws regarding meth in Indiana.

House Bill 1080
will focus on
keeping
Hoosier Roads
safer from
drunk drivers.

House Bill 1264 is aimed at keeping drunk drivers off the road. It requires an ignition interlock system, which works by screening a driver's breath in order to start the vehicle, be installed in a repeat offender's vehicle. The system will detect if a driver attempts to start the vehicle by circumventing the breath test. The car horn will activate and continue to sound until the vehicle is shut off. The system will then lock the auto down for a predetermined period of time.

House Bill 1394 charges anyone 21 years of age or older with a Class B felony for causing the death of another person while operating a vehicle under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In addition, anyone who operates a vehicle under the influence, and with at least one passenger under the age of 18, will be charged with a Class D felony. Anyone with two convictions of causing death while intoxicated and operating a vehicle will have their license suspended for life. This legislation honors the memory of State Rep. Roland Stine, and helps to prevent tragic accidents caused by intoxicated drivers.

Rep. John Frenz

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